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The situation in the Middle East

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Identical letters dated 17 December 2012 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

It is with deep regret that I must draw your attention to the grave suffering and casualties endured by the Palestine refugee population in the Syrian Arab Republic. The crisis raging in Syria has seriously affected several refugee camps, resulting in loss of life and injury to hundreds of Palestine refugees, including children and women, the destruction of property and a precipitous decline in living conditions, and the situation continues to worsen.

Throughout the many months of this ongoing conflict, the Palestine refugees in Syria, who for more than 60 years since the 1948 *Al-Nakba* have found refuge, shelter and stability in the country as they have awaited a just solution to their plight, have sought to stay out of the conflict and to remain neutral. This has also been the aim of the Palestinian leadership, which has acted responsibly, in a manner intended to protect and ensure the safety of the hundreds of thousands of Palestine refugees in Syria. However, the growing impact of this crisis on their human security and on the stability of the refugee camps has become of grave concern and compels me, on behalf of the Palestinian leadership, to call for the urgent attention of the international community to this matter.

We are extremely alarmed by a military attack carried out on Sunday, 16 December, by the Syrian army against the Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus. In that incident, a Syrian fighter jet launched airstrikes against a civilian area, killing at least 25 people and injuring dozens of others. The violent attack has caused widespread fear and panic among the Palestine refugee population and thousands of families are now fleeing, mainly towards Lebanon, for safety, once again displaced and dispossessed as a result of conflict and their vulnerable status as refugees.

We condemn this attack and urgently call upon the international community to uphold the obligation to protect civilians in situations of armed conflict in accordance with international humanitarian law. In the efforts to address the tragic

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crisis in Syria, the safety and well-being of all civilians must be an utmost priority of the international community.

In this regard, we recall the extraordinary work being done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to the Palestine refugees in Syria at this critical time and to ensure their protection. We appeal to the host country, Syria, to continue its long-standing cooperation with and facilitation of efforts by UNRWA to assist the Palestine refugees in Syria. We regret the loss of life among UNRWA staff in this conflict and call for respect of the neutrality of the United Nations by all parties to the conflict.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter distributed as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 36, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Observer
of the State of Palestine to the United Nations